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The 'Nuer of Dinka money' and the demands of the dead: contesting the moral limits of monetised politics in South Sudan

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ABSTRACT

This article critiques explanations of South Sudan's armed conflicts since 2013 that have relied on over-simplified theories of identity or monetised politics. Instead, this article explores the renegotiation of the meanings of monetary exchanges in politics and the inter-linked remaking of political identities. Warring coalitions in South Sudan have mobilised support using different notions of political communities and divergent ideas about the role of money in defining relationships. Some political communities have faced moral condemnation for their apparent willingness to form alliances in exchange for money. The article specifically discusses the emergence of the derogatory term 'Nuer weu' ('Nuer of Dinka money') among the South Sudan armed opposition. Alternatively, other political visions have presented gifts of money as a way to reinvent naturalised, kinship-based political communities, as well as social obligations of revenge and hierarchical norms of giving. The remaking of identity and the moral limits of monetary gifts in politics cannot only mobilise forces to war but also have implications for the moral limits of peace. The article ends by discussing one commander's alternative visions of how elite money in politics could be made consistent with wartime moral norms by providing salaries for the dead.

KEYWORDS

Conflict; ethnicity; exchange; money; South Sudan; death

'Nuer Wew and Nuer Original' (Martha Tongyik)¹

From the December 2013 outbreak of war in South Sudan, Nuer speaking supporters of the armed opposition have used 'Nuer *wew* [*wew*]' to vilify pro-government Nuer. In this song by a popular singer, Martha Tongyik goes as far as presenting 'Nuer *wew*' as the 'root causes' of the conflict. '*Wew*' means money in Dinka, and so 'Nuer *wew*' is an abbreviation of 'Nuer bought with the money of the Dinka'. The use of 'Nuer *wew*' assumed that the government was Dinka-dominated and framed pro-government Nuer as complicit in the government's financial patronage system.

'Nuer *wew*' has been actively used in South Sudan and in the Diaspora, including on social media, in UN Protection of Civilian Sites (POCS) and in village conversations. 'Nuer *wew*' further grew in use on social media after 2016 when the Sudan People's Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO), the main armed opposition group, split and the Taban Deng led faction of the SPLA-IO deepened their loyalties to the government. 'Nuer *wew*' was used as a critique of Taban's supporters.

"Young men have become angry; The Juba state has seen it with naked eyes. The Nuer wew see the original Nuer running into the conflict The original Nuer will not stop fighting just because they don't have bullets. The original Nuer goes closely together into the conflict, as if gathering around the heat of the fire. He is not a Nuer wew. It is the original Nuer who likes fighting as a leader. You have neglected and turned down the Nuer words that were spoken before. The word that motivate the public. You have modified the words. If you refuse, it's up to you. We wait for your provocative words. You are the root causes. South Sudan nation needs a non-violent president. Then South Sudan would be happy and everything will be alright."	"nyetni cike gaak; Ci rool Juba je neen ke tiey nyinkien. Ci Nuäri wew Nuäri tin thu k neen riŋke ni rey köör. Ci Nuäri tin thuok koor bi kap cuoŋ nike Yöö thilke dey mäcni. Ci Nuäri tin thuok ro thiek wäke ni rey koor keel, cetke mi matke guath mac mi leeth. Cie Nuäri wew. Nuär mi thuok en min nhok kor cetke kuär. Cia je cany ka cia ε cuotpiny en ruac Nuäri mee ca lat ni wal. n ruac min moc naath buom. Ci yien ruacni jakä diit. Mi cie lok, gorε ni ji. Lip ney ni ruacni dholädun. jin guan tukni. Wec South Sudan gorε ni kuär mi ci mo raan köör. Dee south sudan löcde cu teeth ka bi ti dial cu gow.
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'Nuer *wew*' not only criticises pro-government Nuer but also the system in South Sudan in which political loyalties can be entangled with monetary transactions. The implicit accusation was that pro-government South Sudanese politics had become dominated by a political logic in which monetary incentives trumped other reasons for political and military loyalty. De Waal describes a 'political marketplace' as an extreme manifestation of neo-liberalism in which political loyalties are commodified and traded for money.² Since the outbreak of war in December 2013, the South Sudan government has given significant financial incentives and monetary rewards to various armed groups and individual commanders in response to their willingness to fight against the SPLA-IO. Political alliances have often realigned at the speed of a marketplace transaction. This had prompted allegations that the government has sought to purchase loyalty. These political marketplace transactions have not been limited to government politics, and the SPLA-IO has also been accused of using promises of money to buy loyalties.³ Yet, as the government has had more financial resources throughout the war, both because of oil revenues and their ability to access loans, the monetised politics has been more closely associated with government. The opposition's use of 'Nuer *wew*' does not just criticise the pro-government Nuer but also asserts that this transaction-based, monetised political system itself is illegitimate.

If the monetisation of politics was to become a pervasive logic of society, we should expect that there will be a new impetus to renegotiate the symbolic meanings of monetary exchanges in politics. Even if elites do display agency including in their choice of political loyalties, they act within a framework of norms that give their actions meaning. We should expect that the moral limits and meanings of money, markets and political market transactions are contested, negotiated and part of societies' pervading social norms. Monetary exchanges have always had a variety of values and symbolic meanings.⁴ In South Sudan, money has long been used to reshape political relationships and transform social structures.⁵ Depending on how money is understood, its exchange can entrench kinship or hierarchy as much as market-style relations.⁶ Graeber argues that there are various different moral logics that govern gifts and exchange, including of money. Exchange is based on equivalence and an expectation of reciprocity. There are also incidences when gifts are not reciprocal and instead are connected to social hierarchies

and orders. Hierarchical relationships are not just formed by arbitrary force, but also by habits and customs.⁷

Opposition mobilisation after December 2013 in South Sudan has largely built on contrasting logics of political loyalties and money, and relied on remaking ideas of wartime communities. The rapid mobilisation of the Nuer against the government in December 2013 evoked identity-based divisions and fears.⁸ In December 2013, uniformed men in Juba targeted and killed people based on the killers' judgement that they were Nuer.⁹ The leadership of the initial armed opposition in 2014 was dominated by figures who had historically opposed leaders in the South Sudan government.¹⁰ Yet, the nascent armed opposition legitimised their anti-government stance with reference to the moral necessity for all Nuer to satisfy kin-like obligations to carry out revenge against the government for the government's apparent targeted killing of Nuer. This built on and remade old norms and social habits.

Martha's song contrasts the 'Nuer *wau*' to the 'Nuer original'. According to her song, the 'Nuer original' are distinguished by their willingness to fight even when they do not have bullets. Since December 2013, pro-SPLA-IO forces have often run short of resources and have even had to ask fighters to enter battle without bullets.¹¹ They have not had the resources to build political loyalties with money.

Martha also defines 'Nuer original' as behaving as if they gather around the heat of the fire:

'The original Nuer goes closely together into the conflict, as if gathering around the heat of the fire.'

In this line, she evokes references to the fires of the home or the cattle camp. By doing this, she not only references rural Nuer life, but also brings to mind the political community of the clan. Clans are based on a shared lineage and kinship, and their members share various social obligations to each other, including providing cattle for other clan members bride wealth or blood compensation (if they have killed). Clan members also have a moral obligation to protect each other in life and to carry out revenge if another member is killed. Historically, it was clan members, or at least those who had a mutual obligation to protect, who would gather around the same cattle-camp fires. Those who shared the same fire had various mutual obligations including to support each other to mobilise to revenge after another clansman's death. Nuer historically were never thought about as a single clan and were a much larger, geographically dispersed, politically divided community. However, in this song, Martha describes the whole Nuer who are fighting against the government as clan-like, capable of gathering around a fire and, therefore, of accepting their moral obligation to revenge.

The image of gathering around the fire echoes a much broader sentiment in pro-opposition mobilisation. The framing of the post-December 2013 wars as a war of revenge against the killing of Nuer remade the Nuer into a kinship-like community in which Nuer had kinship-like obligations to each other. To this extent, the 'Nuer' could be seen as a 'moral ethnicity' in that it was formed from internal discourses around a 'standard of civic logic' and ideas of civility.¹² This moral logic of treating fellow Nuer as kinsmen was not a new concept and resonated with norms that were remade in the 1990s. The implication of this new vision of the Nuer community was that military labour was not commodified but instead subject to the moral expectations of kinship.

The irony in the term 'Nuer original' in Martha's song is that the conflict was re-creating what it meant to be Nuer; there was no such thing as an original Nuer in the sense implied. Identities are not static but are socially constructed, including through conflict and state intrusion, as well as popular songs and representations.¹³ As Lonsdale's work has long shown, even moral ethnicities are historically contingent and change over time.¹⁴ In attempts to remake their constituencies, political leaders often seek to shape identities and political communities. In a recent example, De Waal has highlighted how 'clan units' in the Somalia political system were socially and politically constructed at the 'congruence of public authority and political-military entrepreneurship' and were not a given outcome of the clan/lineage system.¹⁵

At the same time, leaders cannot fully control the way that identities are shaped.¹⁶ Not only may others in society and with power try to shape identities, identities are also restrained by pervading social habits that are only slowly reshaped over time.¹⁷ Identities can sit beneath 'consciousness and choice'.¹⁸ They can also be subject to sudden rupture in times of war.¹⁹ The formation of identities and polities, including clans, can be driven by the way violence is organised.²⁰ Here societies' norms are not limited to those prescribed by the state. As Lund has argued, public authority is an amalgamated result of the exercise of power by a variety of local institutions and the imposition of external institutions.²¹

The speed of the collective mobilisation of the anti-government public in December 2013 involved the extraordinarily rapid application of well-established social norms and moral patterns to the new context of government violence in Juba. This was amplified by telecommunications. War had spread over four of South Sudan's major cities within ten days. While these norms had advantages for the opposition's cheap mobilisation of military labour, they also had the disadvantage of ethnically limiting the opposition to the Nuer. SPLA-IO leader Riek Machar tried but failed to transform these norms and challenge his supporters' interpretation, until he himself mobilised to follow these norms and make use of ethnic divisions.

In this context, the very existence of pro-government Nuer brought both practical and theoretical dilemmas. Pro-opposition Dinka, such as some to the east of the Nile, also brought a similar challenge. For the armed opposition, pro-government Nuer challenged political homogeneity among the Nuer and a homogenous moral obligation to revenge.

At the same time, the vilification of money in politics also brought interpretative challenges for opposition leaders' ability to accept money for peace. The June 2018 peace deal, that is being implemented in 2020, carries no guarantee of justice or revenge for the dead. Yet, it is very likely to bring monetary benefit to the armed opposition and especially their leaders. How can the money of reciprocity be morally reconciled with social habits to revenge?

To explore these themes, this article specifically considers the competing ideas of identity and the intertwined moral visions about the legitimacy of monetary exchange among the armed opposition in South Sudan's Greater Upper Nile region from December 2013 until the signing of the peace deal in June 2018. To do this, the article draws upon ethnographic work conducted by the author among Nuer speakers since 2012. This ethnographic work was carried out among in rural areas to the west of the Nile, in POC sites, in Juba and in the Diaspora. In addition, with the support of South Sudanese research assistants, she was able to access and translate various speeches by

political leaders that had been made in Nuer. The political speeches accessed had been recorded and were circulating between people's phones and on various social media sites. Some of these speeches were then followed up with interviews with people attending the events or others who were relevant for understanding the context of the speech given. She also paid attention to other discussions on social media, in addition to market-place conversations in the Juba and Bentiu POCS and various opposition areas in the western Nuer.

The article first reviews historical discussions of the relationships between authority and money among the Nuer. Next, the article focuses on the post-2013 war and alleged social rupture. It describes the evolving SPLA-IO division between Nuer and Dinka, then outlines the emergence of a strong distinction between moral and immoral political loyalties: the former based on the construction of Nuer as kin, and the latter on immoral market-made loyalties. After December 2013, many of the opposition forces mobilised around a demand for revenge that was constitutive of a new Nuer identity.

The article's final section entitled 'money for the dead' discusses one South Sudanese political vision of how elite monetary transactions can enforce kinship obligations and not simply support transactional monetised politics. The recently deceased opposition leader Peter Gadet was the first SPLA division commander outside of Juba in December 2013 to rebel against the government. In an influential speech in 2015, Peter Gadet argues that money exchanged by elites should be used to marry posthumous wives for the Nuer who died fighting in the wars of revenge against the Dinka. The money can be used to entrench kinship ties and an understanding of the Nuer as kin. In this moral vision, the exchange of elite money could remain legitimate and in-line with opposition logics if it was part of a kinship-based understanding of identity. Gadet is asserting that money in the political marketplace is not without spiritual, moral and legal obligations, and that it need not only be used to form temporary political attachments. He recognises that money is part of the political process but does not see these exchanges as detached from people's moral and spiritual obligations and also capable of reinforcing ideas of the Nuer as clan-like. By evoking and changing Nuer moral norms of revenge to mobilise forces, opposition leaders also made themselves subject to these moral and spiritual codes.

The Nuer of money – A short history of the attempted monetisation of labour and cattle

To appreciate Nuer understandings of money-based transactional politics, it is important to appreciate the historic trajectory of Nuer understandings of money itself. Firstly, historically it was cattle and not money that had a central role in forging relationships and communities among the Nuer. Among the Nuer, there was 'an inherent logic and general significance of the cattle/human equation'.²² This is explained based on the blood of cattle giving them an equivalence to humans. This allowed cattle to be exchanged to forge social and political relationships, including marriage, to end feuds, and to create loyalties among peers. The exchange of cattle at key social moments ensured that loyalties were built through cattle exchange.²³ For example, by giving cattle to a friend for this marriage, the giver not only gained the promise of close friendship with his friend but

also social obligations from his friend's children who would credit the giver with their parents' marriage and their own existence. This could even produce social obligations to provide defensive labour or other services when the giver was in need. These social obligations had political consequences for loyalty and provision of resources.

Secondly, the 20th century among the Nuer was coloured by government and traders' attempts to commodify Nuer cattle, as well as Nuer resistance to this. As documented by Hutchinson, Nuer demand for money only slowly grew from the 1940s in the context of Anglo-Egyptian Condominium rule. The new demand was linked to the government's introduction of cattle auctions and Nuer desires to be buyers in these markets.²⁴ From the 1950s, the government also recruited Nuer men to work on large cotton plantations away from their homelands.²⁵ Migrant labour has been part of Nuer lives ever since and there was a general trend towards the adoption of money.²⁶ However, as money still lacked blood it was unclear if it could bond people together in the way that cattle did.²⁷ The sort of loyalties that could be created through the exchange of money were claimed by some to be weak or non-existent and were still claimed by some Nuer to be in contrast to relationships built on the exchange of cattle.

In the later decades of the 20th century, successful Nuer businessmen managed to penetrate the cattle export market and traded cattle up to Khartoum. It was the trade in cattle, even more than the introduction of money, that prompted ruptures and debates among the Nuer about the meaning and power of money including over social and political relationships. The selling of cattle for money prompted new questions about the social convertibility of cattle to money.²⁸

Thirdly, after the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Sudan government and the SPLA/M, the scale of money available threatened to dwarf the power of cattle. Leaders had unprecedented access to monetary resources through appointments in the new, oil-rich Government of South Sudan. This was particularly visible among the Nuer to the west of the Nile because their land hosted significant oilfields. In the 2010 national elections, money was a visible part of people's attempts to claim power. Candidates competing for the Unity State governorship distributed money especially to students and those in urban centres to pay people to attend rallies and to support them.²⁹ Therefore, money appeared to have a role to play in building reciprocal expectations of political loyalties. At the same time, students joked about taking money from politicians and not voting for their opponents in elections. Reciprocity was not enforced.

Plus, in the post-2005 era, army salary structures were shaped to allow salaries to appear like a gift from the commander.³⁰ The commander expected loyal service in return and the exchange very much carried reciprocal expectations.³¹ After the CPA, many soldiers had already served their commanders for extended periods often with little monetary reward, but the money started to reshape these relationships into those of reciprocity. Unlike students, soldiers' loyalty to their commander was easier to enforce.

Fourthly, norms that cattle could not be reduced to money still persisted but was contested. Local authority figures among the Nuer contested the power of money and reinforced the necessity of cattle in the forging of relationships. For example, many Nuer prophets refused to accept money either as compensation when they settled cases or as gifts. Nuer prophets are individuals who have been seized by a named divinity.³² After 2005, there was a proliferation of people claiming to be prophets among the Nuer and

some became popular public authorities whose *luaks* (thatched, circular cattle barns) were better attended than the chiefs' courts or the commissioners' offices. People showed their loyalty to the prophets through gifts of tobacco and cattle. Gifts were given as a recognition of authority.³³

For example, in 2010, Nyachol who lived in Mayendit (west of the Nile) claimed to be seized by the divinity of *maani*.³⁴ Since the late 19th century, *maani* had previously seized two prophets that were powerful public authorities among the western Nuer throughout their lifetimes. After 2010, Nyachol quickly grew in popularity, especially among the armed youth.³⁵ She demanded that people bring her cattle to demonstrate their loyalty to her. She would accept tobacco from poorer supporters, but she would never accept money. When asked, Nyachol linked her demand for cattle to historic Nuer ideas about blood and the lack of blood in money. In the same conversation, she also highlighted her concern that she would be given stolen money. While cattle were often individually known and their provenance traceable, money that was legitimate was harder to distinguish from illegitimate, stolen money. For Nyachol, some money was clearly illegitimate and she did not want to risk being associated with this.³⁶

Political authority figures did not only use their money but also engaged in the gifting or exchange of cattle to build lasting loyalties. Taban Deng (then Governor of Unity State) married the daughters of various prophets and, therefore, gave large numbers of cattle to their herds. This including marrying the daughter of Gatdet Deng (a senior prophet in Mayom)³⁷ and the daughter of the former prophets of *maani*. Taban maintained a large herd that allowed him to give cattle as well as money. Riek Machar gifted cattle to certain prophets to show loyalty and sacrificed cattle at the *luak* of former prophets of *maani*. These gifts to the prophets can best be understood not as reciprocal but as an expression of a hierarchical order in the prophet's favour.

What really matters here is that there were still Nuer social norms that meant money and especially money used in exchange had contested limits to its ability to create social bonds and loyalties. Therefore, although Nuer were eager to earn money, many Nuer were also eager to convert their money to cattle if they intended to use this wealth to form close relationships or long-lasting loyalties.

The Nuer of Dinka money

Ethnicised, identity-based politics was not always seen as advantageous among the leaders of the SPLA-IO. In the post-2005 era, Riek Machar, while Vice President of South Sudan, promoted the importance of the political constituency of the multi-ethnic, former administrative area of Greater Upper Nile Province. This was part of his strategy to build a constituency that was large enough, and that included enough of the SPLM/A leadership, for Machar to a competitor for SPLM leadership and the planned 2015 presidential elections. The histories of the SPLM/A meant that many of its leadership had homes in Greater Upper Nile. Part of his strategy for building this regional, non-ethnic political identity was through a series of reconciliation attempts. In the 1990s, Machar-aligned forces had fought against various other armed groups and communities across Greater Upper Nile including Bor Dinka and Bul Nuer communities. This deepened identity-based divisions.³⁸ In 2011, Machar publicly apologised to the Bor Dinka community in an attempt to end these divisions from

the 1990s. In 2012, through government structures and with government budgets, Machar started to lead a national reconciliation process.³⁹ He focused his efforts among the Bul Nuer. In 2012, President Salva Kiir ended these processes because of concerns that Machar was using these government budgets to mobilise personal political support.

In 2013, Machar continued to seek multi-ethnic political support. In July 2013, President Salva Kiir dismissed Machar, many of his cabinet and some senior members of the SPLA. Machar then publicly formed a political opposition to Kiir's government and his supporters largely came from Greater Upper Nile. After the outbreak of fighting in Juba in December 2013, Machar fled the capital and many of the pro-Machar SPLM/A members were arrested. In anticipation that these detainees would support Machar's war efforts if released, Machar was eager to maintain the multi-ethnic nature of the nascent armed opposition.

At the same time, from December 2013, among the armed opposition were competing ideas about the identity of the opposition and the moral reasons for conflict. The war started to be framed as a collective Nuer act of revenge. Firstly, the Nuer identity was shaped by the violence that happened in Juba on the 16th and 17 December 2013. Men in army uniforms reportedly went door-to-door killing and targeting Nuer.⁴⁰ These uniformed men based their judgement of Nuer identity on physical appearances, patterns of scarification and an inability to speak Dinka when questioned in Dinka. This made a new, objectified Nuer identity, presenting it as connected to physical, natural characteristics. In these assertions, recent social relations and long histories of blurred, contested ethnic boundaries were forgotten.

Secondly, phones and social media became crucial to ethno-military mobilisation. In the eight years since the CPA, phone networks had been established across South Sudan. Phone masts were even erected in some of the most swampy, isolated areas. They only worked intermittently because of interrupted diesel supplies. As fighting broke out in Juba, interpretations of events quickly spread through phones and social media across South Sudan and around the world. This was despite most people only having specific details about a few incidents at best; most people in Juba were still hiding in their homes to avoid the SPLA fighting.

Among supporters of the emerging armed opposition, there were quickly claims that 20,000 Nuer had been killed in Juba by government forces. This number was large enough to demand moral outrage. The origin of the 20,000 estimate remains unclear. By Christmas day in 2013, Nuer who had fled to UN camps in Juba were describing to humanitarians witnessing first-hand dozens of deaths and estimating that up to 50,000 had been killed. By the end of December 2013, the UN was making statements that about 15,000–20,000 people were seeking refuge in its newly opened POC sites in Juba. One of the first public posts on Facebook about 20,000 people dying in Juba came as late as March 2014 from Nuer in the Canadian Diaspora. The author clearly noted that this violence would construct a Nuer – Dinka division. He wrote:

'the hate we developing between nuer and dinka is going tear our country apart. In juba; they massre over 20000 nuer civilians in juba. but that's our government that supposed to protect the citizens, but instead they want the fighting keep going on'.

In many ways, the mobilisation of the armed opposition in late 2013 and early 2014 was a bottom-up process driven by popular demand for an anti-government response, and not controlled by the leadership in that moment. At the same time, the popular demand for an anti-government war was shaped by pre-existing norms and moral expectations that had been political influenced over the previous decades. The popular call to arms against the government was not just to defend the Nuer from government force, but also to revenge for the acts carried out in Juba in December 2013.⁴¹ The nascent opposition leadership did not construct notions of revenge in that moment, but people's demand for revenge was the product of the slow evolution of norms of revenge during the 1980s, 1990s and into the post 2005 peace. The previous decades had remade norms of revenge and made it possible to imagine the post December 2013 wars as a war of revenge.⁴²

The concept of revenge builds on socio-economic understandings of kinship obligations as clans made up of paternal kinship groupings have historically been the unit through which feuds are fought. Within a clan, there is an obligation to provide for each other's bride wealth (cattle or other wealth given to the bride's family for marriage) or to pay blood compensation. Plus, clan members are expected to mobilise to support each other including to revenge after another clansman's death.

Nuer historically were not analogous to a clan. Nuer speakers number millions, are spread across a broad geographic area on both sides of the Nile and have been incredibly difficult to unify politically. Machar and Garang, in the 1990s, blurred this line between the clan and Nuer categories through their provocation of Nuer-Dinka wars around an idea that there was a moral obligation to defend one's co-ethnic.⁴³ At the same time, the wars of the 1990s against the Government of Sudan and between formal parties largely had narratives of liberation or ideology and not revenge.⁴⁴ Communities' and commanders' framing of the post-December 2013 wars as wars of revenge against killing of Nuer remade the Nuer into a kinship-like community in which Nuer had kinship-like obligations to each other. The implication of this new vision of the Nuer community was that military labour of the opposition was not commodified but instead subject to the moral expectations of kinship. These ideas about revenge allowed the opposition to mobilise incredibly fast without monetary resources.⁴⁵

In many ways, ethnicised, pro-revenge anti-government public responses accelerated ahead of politician's narratives and forced political leaders to mobilise along these lines of ethnicity and revenge. In early 2014, Machar was still trying to highlight the multi-ethnic nature of the SPLA-IO. The Nuer dominance of the armed opposition provided problems for Machar's attempts to create a pan-ethnic constituency, possibly around an Upper Nile identity, and to keep together his coalition of SPLM leaders that had formed during 2013. These leaders were detained by Kiir in December 2013 but Machar hoped they would join his opposition when released. In 2014, there were some, even if inconsistent, efforts by the SPLA-IO leadership to frame the war as against the government and not the Dinka. At the first meeting of the SPLA-IO in April 2014, Machar even opted to speak in English (and not Nuer) to avoid alienating the very few non-Nuer present at the gathering.⁴⁶ This caused much frustration among the many participants who could not understand. Even the name of the SPLA-IO framed the war as being between wings of the SPLA and not as a Nuer-Dinka war. However, the 'SPLA-IO' naming was strongly opposed by many of the opposition commanders in the April 2014 meeting in Pagak. These commanders had fought the SPLA for many decades and distrusted this institution.

For the SPLA-IO, especially as their narrative became more ethnic, the existence of pro-government Nuer brought a particular moral problem, and such forces have existed throughout the war. For example, in December 2013, Bul Nuer forces based near Mayom supported the government and provided a strategically important pro-government force near the Unity State oilfields.⁴⁷ Pro-government Nuer undermined narratives of a common Nuer victimhood and the moral necessity for all Nuer to satisfy kin-like obligations to carry out revenge against the government. This brought into question any attempt at political homogeneity among the Nuer and a homogenous moral obligation to revenge.

It was in this context of the moral ambiguity about pro-government Nuer that ideas of Nuer identity and the moral meanings of money became explicitly entangled. Opposition supporters started to use 'Nuer *weu*' as a derogatory term to challenge the authority, and even the identity, of Nuer who were supporting government. Nuer who supported the government were accused of accepting money in exchange for their loyalty. For their accusers, this relationship with government was purely reciprocal, transactional and illegitimate. The pro-government Nuer could be portrayed as rejecting some of the most esteemed norms of Nuer social relations, such as the obligation to revenge, in exchange for money. Their apparent choice to instead build social relations on the exchange of money made them morally and socially insignificant. Their government loyalty was morally constructed as abhorrent both as they were no longer 'Nuer' but also because they based social relations on money and reciprocity.

New Nuer divisions and the growing use of Nuer *Weu*

By 2015, the SPLA-IO was militarily weak.⁴⁸ The 2015 internationally mediated Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) appeared to be the best deal for the opposition and this necessitated their return to Juba. Taban Deng (previously chief negotiator for the SPLA-IO) returned to Juba to take up the SPLA-IO allocated post of the Ministry of Mining. In July 2016, Salva Kiir and Riek Machar's forces fought outside the Presidential Palace in Juba. Whatever ignited the violence and Machar's subsequent flight from Juba, Taban Deng used this as an opportunity to shift his alliance to Kiir and to claim authority over the SPLA-IO. Kiir quickly recognised Deng as the First Vice President.

Loyalists of Riek Machar quickly accused Taban Deng of using his new access to the financial resources of government to buy support. Deng was portrayed as giving money with the clear reciprocal expectation of displays of political loyalty. Loyalties to Taban after July 2016 were seemingly short-term, emphasizing their market-like character. To this extent, they appeared to be the opposite of previous opposition loyalties that had been built on clan-like, long term social obligations. Money to fund loyalties was not consistently available prompting fluidity and brevity in alliances. Gifts of money did not create any lasting social obligations but instead the commitment to provide loyalty only for a specific moment. After the 2016 violence, some political figures that had got stuck in the Juba POCs after the July 2016 violence even promised loyalty to Taban just to give them access to Juba airport so that they could safely leave South Sudan. Some defected or went politically silent as soon as they were in a place of safety.

The division between Taban Deng and Riek Machar again contradicted the clear Nuer-Dinka dichotomy that the opposition had relied on to mobilise support. Machar's supporters used 'Nuer *weu*' to morally condemn Taban Deng and imply his transgression of the moral boundaries of the market. On social media, discussion of Nuer *weu* became more prevalent.⁴⁹ On Facebook, Nuer *weu* was barely used until Taban's defection.

Among SPLA-IO supporters, a sense of fear was also generated against anyone thought to be buying loyalties for Taban. For example, Nuer living in Juba town who had often visited friends in the Juba POCS no-longer felt safe to visit the POCS in case they were accused of trying to use money to buy Taban support.

However, among many of those still living in rural areas or in refugee camps in Sudan, there was less of a condemnation of the acceptance of money by Taban's supporters. The money received was not seen as necessarily 'bitter' or 'polluted'.⁵⁰ Instead there seemed to be sympathy with people's need to find a way to survive. It is unclear if this was only because of more difficult material circumstances away from Juba, or because political discourses and moral boundaries also varied.

Opponents have also racialised visions of the moral limits of the market. Accusations about Taban Deng's politics tried to limit the legitimacy of his political behaviour based on beliefs that his biological father was an Arab trader. Some comments have described Taban Deng's marketplace politics as being based on his Sudanese family background as if these logics of power were an inherited, naturalised trait among an Arab race. In the Sudans, marketisation has long been ethnicised. This ethnicisation emerged from histories of labour, cattle and land, but also the slave trade from the 19th century.⁵¹ More recently, in the wars of the 1980s and 1990s, Arab traders were often described as exploitative and greedy based on their interest in cash over social relations.⁵² In South Sudan, the transaction based, political marketplace politics is often referred to as '*Jellaba politics*' to highlight the association with northern Sudan and the trading of power. Taban's opponents associated his political bargaining with Sudan in a way that essentialised racial identity and pushed towards an inherent link between race and the monetisation of politics.

From the outset, in response, Taban Deng emphasised his Nuer identity. For example, the day after Taban Deng was appointed as First Vice President, he made a public speech in English. His statement included:

'I am not a foreigner why Riek Machar should be surprised why Taban Deng should lead the SPLA-IO. No. I am from IO. I am not a foreigner. I am not *jur*. *Jur* in Nuer is someone foreigner.'

The speech opens in English, instead of Nuer or Arabic. Therefore, Taban's speech appears to be directly addressed at an international audience. The international community's recognition of him as leader of the SPLA-IO was crucial to his power. He explicitly demands that he be recognised as part of the IO. In the speech, he reminds people of his role as a liberator in the SPLA wars of the 1980s and 1990s. In this extract he also uses the Nuer word, '*jur*'. In doing so, Taban Deng not only contests rhetoric that highlights his Sudanese connections or suggestions that he is not truly Nuer, but his use of Nuer language also makes a clear statement that he himself is a Nuer. His references to the SPLA wars provide a different vision of what it means to be a Nuer that connects this

identity to older wars and to Southern struggles against the Sudan government. In such a context, the exchange of money in politics was not necessarily reprehensible.

Money for the dead

In early 2020, the June 2018 peace deal in South Sudan was about to be implemented. In June 2018, pressure from then President of Sudan, Bashir, and President of Uganda, Museveni, prompted a closed-door deal. Bashir was particularly eager for peace both to please international actors and to increase revenues to stabilise his own political turmoil. In September 2018, the ARCSS was revised and signed to cement this deal. While the precise details of the June 2018 discussions are not publicly known, an initial document highlighted that a redistribution of South Sudan's oil money was a focus. This deal was a rapid realignment of loyalties among elites in three countries based on monetary exchanges and reciprocity. The long, R-ARCSS document signed in September 2018 also made it clear that the leaders of the warring party would gain government positions and associated monetary benefits.

To many South Sudanese, the June 2018 peace deal was a clear deal in the political marketplace that did not change the nature of politics in South Sudan. Elites realigned their loyalties with the speed of a market exchange. There appeared to be clear reciprocal expectations in which money was exchanged for peace and loyalties. However, as the SPLA-IO had spent the war morally condemning loyalty bought with money, it was difficult to see how the SPLA-IO could make moral sense of their sudden peace with Kiir.

The answer to this moral ambiguity is unclear. However, previous interpretative labour by some opposition leaders provides the possibility for receipt of money to make peace to be seen as legitimate. Senior South Sudanese military commander, Peter Gadet, died in April 2019. However, in previous debates about how the opposition could accept money, Peter Gadet presented an alternative moral vision of how monetary exchange in South Sudanese politics could be consistent with the kinship-based logics promoted by the SPLA-IO. He advocated the use of government funds to finance a form of wealth redistribution that would strengthen relationships embedded in non-monetary kinship-based socio-economic systems. This gave political monetary transactions different meanings, moral limits and a justification from a Nuer cosmological perspective. This gave political, monetary transactions a less venal meaning.

Peter Gadet was a key opposition figure from the outbreak of the war in December 2013. Peter Gadet was born in Mayom, among the Nuer to the west of the Nile. In the wars of the 1980s, he had been deputy to the anti-SPLA leader Paulino Matip (also from Mayom). Yet, his career was most marked by his serial defections to and from the various warring parties in Southern Sudan. After the 2005 CPA, he fluctuated in and out of alignment with the South Sudan government. In 2012, he declared a rebellion against the Southern government from Mayom. Yet, by mid 2013, he had accepted the government's incentives to return to government and he was again back in the government's SPLA. His willingness to accept monetary incentives after rebellion means that Gadet is often seen as an archetypal rebel in the South Sudan political marketplace; his short-lived, periodic rebellions can appear to just provide an opportunity to make a claim of monetary reward and promotion. In 2013, he was deployed by the SPLA to be division commander of the SPLA's 8th Division in Jonglei

State. His main task was to suppress another anti-government rebellion led by David Yau Yau.

After the eruption of violence in Juba in December 2013, Peter Gadet was quick to declare his rebellion against the government and to capture the SPLA's 8th Division arsenals. Gadet was in contact with Riek Machar from the earliest days of the war yet it was only months later that they were able to meet to share their understanding of their rebellion. Peter Gadet was a strong advocate of understanding the war as a necessary war of revenge by the Nuer. Gadet was given a senior position in the SPLA-IO and deployed to command SPLA-IO efforts in Unity State close to his home areas to the west of the Nile.

Later, in 2015, Peter Gadet defected from Machar's leadership of the armed opposition. His defection came at the time of the signing of ARCSS and Gadet claimed that this agreement did not satisfy the demands of the war. The agreement had also sidelined him and he was unsure of material benefit from the agreement. Gadet's defection also came soon after the killing of his son in Bor and Gadet blamed Machar for failing to protect him.

Whatever the reasons for Gadet's 2015 defection from the SPLA-IO and his serial defections over previous decades, it is clear that Gadet felt the necessity to engage in interpretative labour that legitimised his actions to his supporters. In this context, he used the opportunity of his son's funeral in Khartoum to assert an alternative vision of the legitimate exchange of money between politicians.

Specifically, Peter Gadet argued that money gained through peace deals should be paid as compensation for those who died in the war so that a posthumous wife can be married in the name of the dead. This is in tune with Nuer moral expectations after deaths in battles for revenge. Marrying for the dead brings them a second chance of life through the children that are born in their name.⁵³ In this way, the exchange of money between elites could be imagined as only the first step before money was converted to cattle that could be used as bride wealth in order to marry a wife for the deceased. Although children from this wife would be biologically fathered by the living, they would be the children of the deceased as legal paternity rests with the man whose provided bride wealth (including via his family) for the marriage. Money for political transactions could become cattle and build different, long-term relationships from the temporary relations of the political market.

Money used for marrying dead SPLA-IO combatants would recreate new meanings and political relationships. It would extend the clan-like relationship that the SPLA-IO had used to call all Nuer to a war of revenge beyond mobilisation to war and into post-peace compensation. An elite deal could be seen as an exchange of compensation if it was used to compensate those who died in war. Plus, in receiving and redistributing cattle, the political leadership would take on an uncle-like role, with obligations of long-term loyalty. This would not be a simple relationship of reciprocity, but instead would use money to entrench hierarchical norms and habits.

In the speech at his son's funeral, Gadet announced declared that:

'We cannot just go to Juba where you Riek and Taban have money in the bank, and we go back to Juba for nothing. We want a guarantee that our debts will be paid and we will have more power later. Our ghosts must have salaries.'⁵⁴

Here Gadet distinguishes between the legitimate and illegitimate use of money in politics. For Gadet, the money in the banks of individuals, such as Machar and Taban, is illegitimate. He was critiquing the peace deal that would take Machar and Taban back to Juba as he was concerned it would amount to no more than a deal to benefit those elites. However, he also asserts a positive vision for the use of monetary transactions between elites and South Sudanese. He posits that money is needed to pay the salaries or debts to the ghosts that have died in the wars. Salaries here are not necessarily understood as part of a market for waged labour, but instead as more akin to pensions. Salaries either in the names of those who died or in the names of their relatives would carry an obligation that the money would be used to buy cattle to marry for the deceased.

Posthumous wives do not only provide another chance at life for the dead but can also restore relationships after revenge. The Nuer had fought a war of revenge with government. The salaries would come from government. These salaries from the government, if used to buy cattle to marry for the dead, would act as if one feuding party had given compensation to the other feuding party in order to restore peace. In this scenario, just as in the SPLA-IO discourses of mobilisation, the opposition and the Nuer can still be imagined as equivalent to a clan. Yet, through the exchange of wealth, they are no longer a clan feuding with government but a clan accepting compensation in order to restore peace.

Therefore, Gadet is pushing back against the use of government money as part of an exchange for political loyalty. This creates a reciprocal relationship in which loyalty is given in exchange for money. Instead, Gadet is imagining that the money from a government at peace should instead be used to satisfy demands from relationships that are built from habits and customs, and that define identity, and that cannot be reduced to reciprocity. The opposition remade the moral norms of revenge when mobilising supporters to war. The logics of these moral norms do not demand reciprocity but a recognition of the moral obligations for compensation for the dead in order to recognise their continued social existence and power.

Men still often fear the ghosts of their deceased brothers if they use their family's wealth to marry a wife before buying a posthumous wife. When the war continued, Nuer living as exiles in Sudan and, closer to home, in Bentiu, are currently debating whether their brothers' ghosts will be patient. As times are difficult, poverty is high and cattle scarce, people hope that the ghosts of the dead will not blame them for having to wait to easier times to acquire a wife for them. Therefore, Gadet drew on widespread contemporary dilemmas to offer a popular alternative for who was responsible for compensation.

At the same time, Gadet's claims that compensation could be in money and not cattle could bring potential social confusion. Based on her ethnographic work in the 1980s, Hutchinson highlighted that money could not compensate in the way that cattle can because money is without blood (unlike the cow and the deceased).⁵⁵ Even in contemporary Nuer courts in refugee camps in Sudan and Kenya, where no cows are readily available, compensation is negotiated in cattle even if these cattle are then converted to money.⁵⁶ Here, however, Gadet appears to be asserting that monetary salaries would be enough to buy compensation. Many Nuer understood this to mean that salaries could be used to buy cattle for the deceased which could then be used to buy posthumous wives. In discussions among Machar's supporters, it was not only believed that they themselves

had a moral duty to do this, but that Machar had recruited to the SPLA-IO with the promise that he would provide salaries to compensate for those who died fighting on his behalf.⁵⁷

Gadet is asserting that money in the political marketplace is not without spiritual, moral and legal obligations, and that it need not only be used to form temporary political attachments. He recognises that money is part of the political process but does not see these exchanges as detached from people's moral and spiritual obligations nor as necessarily about market exchanges. There should not be personal exchanges for elite loyalties but there should be money to satisfy the consequences of war. If not, the political elite had the ghosts of the dead to contend with. By evoking and changing Nuer moral norms of revenge to mobilise forces, they had also made themselves subject to these moral and spiritual codes.

At the same time, few Nuer interviewed believe any opposition politician was likely to enact this vision. In practice, marrying for the dead fell back to much more limited visions of clan membership.

The popularity of Gadet's theories of politics and money have implications for post-conflict peace and justice. In 2020, now that there is peace, young men will face new spiritual and moral dangers if they do not prioritise marrying for their deceased relatives. This competition and fear of the dead means that many South Sudanese will not experience the formation of a new, united, transitional government as one of personal and familial peace. Instead it brings new struggles and moral dilemmas. Gadet has offered a way for spiritual and moral peace, in-line with wartime norms of revenge, to also be made.

However, Gadet's vision of restitution is a very different vision from the justice posited in R-ARCSS. The R-ARCSS includes provisions for a hybrid court, as well as traditional justice mechanisms for reconciliation and healing.⁵⁸ Although the new, power-sharing government is being formed, all observers remain sceptical about whether these justice mechanisms will be implemented. This perspective echoes the structure of R-ARCSS to present justice and healing as a discrete processes from the process of the formation and running of the transitional government. However, Gadet's vision highlights that many South Sudanese see these as intimately entangled. In this scenario, government money could be used to not create elite peace but to create a more long lasting peace with the dead and the grieved.

Conclusion

The 2020 formation of a new, power-sharing government of South Sudan brings the possibility of a multi-year end to the conflict between South Sudan's current warring parties. However, it is much less clear whether this new arrangement of power and peace will carry legitimacy, and whether the moral meanings of money in politics will allow this configuration of government to be morally meaningful.

The wars in South Sudan since December 2013 have created a new context for the debates about the moral boundaries and political meanings of monetary exchange in politics and these meanings' inter-connections with political loyalties and communities. Giving money does not always create reciprocity, but instead can assert a non-reciprocal relationship and acceptance of power, social norms and connected identities. The

political system in South Sudan has allowed political elites to trade loyalties for monetary rewards. Yet, the moral boundaries and meaning of such exchanges have been contested both through derogatory terms such as ‘Nuer *wau*’ and also through alternative visions of the role of money in politics, such as the use of money to satisfy the demands of the dead. These debates are also embedded in the remaking of identities and political communities. How monetary exchange in politics is understood reshapes the various bases upon which a polity is drawn together and the scale of a political community. The SPLA-IO ended up being driven by a remaking of the Nuer as a clan-like political entity in which there was a mutual expectation of revenge. In SPLA-IO politician Peter Gadet’s vision, money in politics could only make sense in this context if it was used to satisfy the inter-generational demands of the dead and was used to pay compensation to the constructed clan-like social unit of the Nuer.

Political marketplaces in which political power is traded are associated with the disassembly of governance institutions.⁵⁹ The trading of power undermines institutions that seek to govern society and regulate power. Yet, in South Sudan’s recent wars, we also see that norms and institutions can evolve to regulate the boundaries of the legitimacy of political marketplace transactions and the associated political communities. These evolving norms can draw upon long-term patterns and moral boundaries that have become normalised and relatively static social habits. Warring parties and individual commanders, such as Gadet, build their authority on their ability to shape these norms and debates. At the same time, these resistant social habits can prove a limit on the powers of the elite.

As the new transitional government of South Sudan is formed, and as wars are paused, there is a new, key moment in the renegotiation of the South Sudanese political community and the entwined understandings of the moral meanings of money in politics. Understanding the cosmological contestations over the meanings of money and associated identity will remain pivotal for understanding South Sudan.

Notes

1. This song can be heard in Nuer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xYEh7QX-wuM>. The lyrics written here are based on a translation of this recording. This English transcription and translation was carried out by a Nuer speaking school teacher living in opposition areas near Leer.
2. De Waal, Alex, ‘When kleptocracy becomes insolvent’.
3. Alan Boswell’s unpublished work on the wars in the Equatorias has documented how the 2015 peace agreement allowed the SPLA-IO to promise future salaries in exchange for loyalty to the SPLA-IO.
4. Parry and Bloch, *Money and the Morality of Exchange*.
5. Thomas, *South Sudan*.
6. Graeber, ‘On the moral grounds of economic relations’.
7. Graeber, ‘On the moral grounds of economic relations’.
8. Thiong, ‘How the politics of fear generated chaos in South Sudan’.
9. Human Rights Watch, *South Sudan’s New War*.
10. Johnson, ‘Briefing’.
11. Opposition fighters were advised to take bullets from killed pro-government fighters.
12. Lonsdale, ‘Moral ethnicity’, p.131.

13. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*; De Waal, 'Group identity, rationality and the state'; Turton, 'War and Ethnicity'.
14. Lonsdale, 'Moral and Political Argument in Kenya'.
15. De Waal, 'Somalia's Disassembled State', p. (abstract).
16. Vlassenroot, 'Citizenship, identity formation and conflict in South Kivu'.
17. Bourdieu, 'The Social Space'.
18. Bourdieu, 'Rethinking the state', p.15. As highlighted in Dodge, 'Bourdieu goes to Baghdad'.
19. Baczko et al., *Civil War in Syria*.
20. De Waal, 'Somalia's Disassembled State'.
21. Lund, 'Twilight Institutions'.
22. Hutchinson, 'The Cattle of Money', p.302.
23. Hutchinson, 'The Cattle of Money', p.302.
24. Hutchinson, 'The Cattle of Money'.
25. Hutchinson, 'The Cattle of Money'.
26. Thomas, *South Sudan*. Thomas, *Cash-based programming and conflict*.
27. Hutchinson, 'The Cattle of Money'.
28. Hutchinson, 'The Cattle of Money'.
29. Interviews with students that were in Bentiu in 2010 both in Wau in 2010 and in Juba in 2017.
30. Pinaud, 'South Sudan'.
31. Graeber, 'On the moral grounds of economic relations'.
32. PROPHETS.
33. Graeber, 'On the moral grounds of economic relations'.
34. Hutchinson and Pendle, 'Violence, legitimacy and prophecy'; Pendle, 'Politics, prophets and armed mobilisations'.
35. Pendle, 'Politics, prophets and armed mobilisations'.
36. Discussions with Nyachol in 2013.
37. Hutchinson and Pendle, 'Violence, legitimacy and prophecy'.
38. Jok and Hutchinson, 'Sudan's Prolonged Second Civil War'.
39. Speech by Angelina Teng, 22 June 2013, Juba (South Sudan).
40. African Union 2015; Human Rights Watch 2014.
41. Young, *Isolation and Endurance*.
42. Pendle, 'The dead are just to drink from'.
43. Jok and Hutchinson, 'Sudan's Prolonged Second Civil War'.
44. For discussions of the wartime ideologies of the SPLA, see Thomas, *South Sudan*.
45. Judith's paper.
46. Young, 'Isolation and endurance'.
47. Craze and Tubiana, *A State of Disunity*.
48. Craze et al, *A State of Disunity*.
49. This is based on the use of 'Nuer *weu*' on the comment pages on the *Sudan Tribune* website. The Sudan Tribune is an online newspaper edited in Europe that includes an unmoderated comments board on which people are freely post.
50. High, 'Polluted money, polluted wealth'.
51. Jok, *War and Slavery in Sudan*.
52. Keen, David, *Benefits of famine*.
53. Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*.
54. Gadet, speech during the funeral of his son in 2015, in Nuer.
55. Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas*.
56. Based on court observations in Kosti and Kakuma in 2017 and 2018.
57. Interviews conducted y Nuer researcher in Khartoum and Kosti, May – June 2018.
58. Chapter 5, Revised-Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan.
59. De Waal and Kaldor, 'Introduction'. This special issue.

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